

May 24, 2026 - 2 Samuel 21:1-14 - "Until the Rain Falls"

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[0 : 00] Please turn to 2 Samuel 21, 1-14. Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year.

And David sought the face of the Lord. And the Lord said, There is blood guilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death. So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them.

Now the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites. Although the people of Israel had sworn to spare them, Saul had sought to strike them down in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah.

And David said to the Gibeonites, What shall I do for you? And how shall I make atonement that you may bless the heritage of the Lord? The Gibeonites said to him, It is not a matter of silver or gold between us and Saul or his house.

Neither is it for us to put any man to death in Israel. And he said, What do you say that I shall do for you? They said to the king, The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel.

[1 : 18] Let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we may hang them before the Lord at Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the Lord. And the king said, I will give them.

But the king spared Mephibosheth and the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the Lord that was between them, between David and Jonathan, the sons of Saul.

The king took the two sons of Rizpah and the daughter of Ahab, whom she bore to Saul, Armani, and Mephibosheth, and the five sons of Merib, the daughter of Saul, whom she bore Adriel, the son of Barzilia, and the Mahalothite.

And he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the mountain before the Lord. And the seven of them perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of barley harvest.

Then Rizpah, the daughter of Ahab, took sathcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of the harvest until rain fell upon them from the heavens. And she did not allow the birds of the air to come upon them by day, or the beasts of the field by night.

[2 : 28] When David was told what Rizpah, the daughter of Ahab, the concubine of Saul, had done, David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from the men of Jebush Gilead, who had stolen from them from the public square of Bethson, where the Philistines had hung them on the day of the Philistines killed Saul on Gilboa.

And he brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan, and they gathered the bones of those who were hanged. And they buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the land of Benjamin and Zillah, in the tomb of Kish, his father.

And they did all that the king commanded. And after that, God responded to the plea for the land. This is God's word. Thanks be to God.

Amen. We're now entered into the epilogue of 2 Samuel.

And this means a couple of important things. These final chapters are not just like leftovers towards the end, things that the author maybe forgot to put in there and just wanted to tag them on to the end.

[3 : 51] They're actually not even arranged chronologically, these last several chapters. But what they are, how the author has structured these final chapters is theologically.

So there's a specific reason, there's a specific emphasis that the author is ending this book this way. And so hopefully we can see that as we unpack the scripture over these next couple weeks here.

And my intention was actually to continue to preach through the end of this chapter. However, I think there's enough intensity within these first 14 verses to be emotionally nice for you guys. And it was very difficult this week preparing for today. But these chapters at the end of this book make us ask the author, what kind of kingdom is this?

What has this become? It makes us look back over the entire story and say, God, what have you been showing us since 1 Samuel 1, verse 1?

[5 : 26] What are we still waiting for? And the structure of these final four chapters is carefully arranged. We'll call it a hamburger sort of ending. You got a mirrored image where you can kind of picture a hamburger.

You got the buns on each side. And then the inner chapters are different than the outer chapters. The outer chapters show problems in David's kingdom.

And the inner portions of the book and these chapters show the strength of his kingdom. So you got the problems and you got the strength.

And you're going to feel that go back and forth as we end this book. But at the center, we have a hope of David's kingdom only through the power of God's hand, working in both the strengths and the problems.

And today we begin with a problem in David's kingdom. And it's quite heavy. This is a story of a famine, of blood guilt, of covenant breaking, of execution, of grief, exposed bodies, burial, but answered prayer.

[6 : 43] It's not emotionally neat. It's not very kind to us. It doesn't wrap up with a simple lesson to make us all feel better. If this is your first time here at Steel Valley, welcome.

So we don't want to sterilize God's word, right? We want God to speak to us. We want to hear from him. So we can't sterilize it. We shouldn't rush to clean it up a little bit or flatten it into some shallow moral lesson.

But scripture sometimes focuses us to sit with the horror of a fallen world without offering immediate emotional relief.

But that doesn't mean that this text is hopeless. There is horror in this text, but it doesn't mean it's hopeless.

This passage is meant to make us say, we need a better king. We need something better than this.

[7 : 58] This is an absolute mess. It's not meant to say, well, what a satisfying solution to these problems, and they live happily ever after. No.

The sermon title today, it's a little poetic, Until the Rain Falls. Until the Rain Falls. And I'm going to break this up into three sections within this narrative.

And I'd like us to see a main point develop towards the end. That main point is that sin leaves famine, but Jesus brings the rain.

Sin leaves famine, but Jesus brings the rain.

Let's join together in prayer as we dive in and we break this chapter up, or these verses up a little bit. Let's pray. Father, we come to you today knowing that I'm a stuttering mess.

[9 : 16] We are an imperfect people. We need you so badly. And as we think about the weight of Pentecost Sunday and your Holy Spirit dwelling with people, dwelling with your people, we remember that we are not left alone.

We are not here with a difficult text alone, watching this horror unfold alone, but we have your Spirit to guide us right now, to comfort us, and to speak.

So we ask you to let your Holy Spirit work, even in this very dark season and point in history. Help me to communicate your truth according to your word and your agenda, not mine.

And we also lift up our brother Jack preaching at another church today. Empower him at this moment as well to speak your word boldly. We praise in Jesus' name.

Amen. Until the rain falls. The first section, I have these thematically broken up of what we see in these chunks of verses.

[10 : 35] So we have unresolved guilt causing covenant grief. Cause and effect. Unresolved guilt causes covenant grief.

It says, Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year. And David sought the face of the Lord, and the Lord said, There is blood guilt on Saul and on his house because he put the Gibeonites to death.

Verse 1 begins with a crisis, and it's sort of like an emphatic crisis. I tried to emphasize it a little bit year after year, meaning that this wasn't just a bad harvest.

It wasn't just a really hot summer in Ohio where everything is dry and crispy like it was last year. No, this was three years of empty fields.

Meyer was empty. Aldi was empty. This is three years of adults starving, childrens laying on their deathbed asking mom or dad for food and water.

[11 : 55] three years of prayers that seemed unanswered and a God who seemed distant.

David considers the issue being a little bit more deep than agricultural. He considers maybe this is more theological. And he goes to the Lord in prayer.

He asks the Lord, What is going on here? And the Lord replies, There is blood guilt on Saul and on his house.

The Lord responds in a way that connects the famine with previous sin. Now that raises a hard question. Many hard questions.

Saul's dead, right? His body's stinky dead, right? Years have passed and people are suffering under a famine related to this dead man's sin?

[12 : 58] That's odd. But the answer is yes. Yes. Saul's blood guilt remains unresolved.

Verse 2 gives some of the background. This is directly related to the Gibeonites and how Saul dealt with them. The Gibeonites, these were a people group who were not Israelites.

And this goes all the way back to Joshua chapter 9. This is where biblical theology comes in play.

And this is a moment where the Gibeonites, who could have been killed and wiped away, they were spared remnants of the Amorites that Israel swore an oath to, to spare, to keep, to protect.

But Saul, in his religious zeal, right, he violated the oath and sought to destroy them. That's why the Lord says, in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah.

This is why there's blood guilt. Saul probably thought that he was doing something noble. Don't you think? Like, just wiping out the enemy and any possibility of any betrayals in the future, let's just clean the slate and get rid of them because he has faith in Israel and Judah to remain protected.

[14 : 34] And so he had zeal. But here we see really quickly that according to God's word, zeal that's unrestrained and misdirected is very dangerous.

Like, religious passion does not make sin justifiably holy or righteous. It's a very good biblical lesson, a scriptural lesson for us.

So what does true zeal look like in the life of God's people? true zeal trembles at God's word. At breaking the covenants.

Trembles at that thought. So for Saul, his sin was not merely murder. As if the Gibeonites didn't matter. As if that these people were kind of just disposable people.

No, this was covenant breaking murder. this is a pretty big deal. He tried to defend Israel by violating Israel's oath before God.

[15 : 48] And this gives us a very deep theological burden that we have to see today. And that, the whole point that we need to see today is that sin will outlive the sinner.

Sin outlives the sinner. The effects are still remaining. It's reverberating through present time, even though the past is in the past. Saul's gone.

He's decayed. But his blood guilt still cries out in this famine. Still is laying on a deathbed. A child asking their parents for food and water.

His reign is over, but consequences of his reign still continues. And church, might God be wanting us to see the consequences of sin that can spread like a virus when it is undealt with and unresolved?

Right? This does not mean that every sufferer committed Saul's sin. No, it means sin is never contained as if we're pretending that it never existed.

[17 : 03] Sin spills. Sin spreads. It stains. In church, we throw around language here. I've been teaching the Discover SVC class for people who want to learn more about the church and even people who want to join the church in membership.

And we talk a lot about healthy churches and things. We toss around that word healthy church. And a healthy church is not just a busy church.

It's not just a pragmatic church that has all these programs, all these amenities, the comfiest chairs, the greatest children's programs, and so on and so forth.

And do you need your pillow fluff to make you feel at home here? And the perfect greeting center, the perfect greeters. Unless you're pretty baller, so thanks for greeting today.

But, you know, like these things aren't what dictate a healthy church. No. A healthy church is a collective of believers striving together to kill sin, to separate ourselves from sin, and move towards Christ.

[18 : 24] That's a healthy church. You want to know how to kill the church's witness very quickly? Let people do what they want.

let sin remain. Don't have hard conversations. Treat church discipline what God's Word instructs the New Testament church to deal with sin in an appropriate manner that reveals both grace and severity of sin.

A restorative process found and prescribed for the church today. You want to know how to kill that witness?

Treat all that as optional. Talk about mission and tolerate rebellion. Build a church identity around activity, not holiness. Church, it might look good, it might sound good, it might even smell good, but it is just perfuming a rotten corpse.

It's not health. It's a famine with a mission statement. It starts subtle, doesn't it? This kind of move towards sin.

[19 : 36] It starts with maybe missing church every now and then, and then just saying, ah, this bed feels comfy. That was me this morning. But I got up, praise the Lord, praise the Lord.

Carmen's like, I'm not preaching this. It starts subtle, missing church here and there. Maybe it advances to maybe unaddressed bitterness for another church member or somebody else in your life, and that grows.

Or maybe it's just those intrusive thoughts that you have in your head, whether they're sexual fantasies or passions or just maybe coveting, wanting to win that Powerball, winning and imagining your life being something completely different.

Church, according to this passage, by nature, sin unaddressed will spread. Whether it's an intrusive thought or even missing church, it only grows.

It only gets more complicated. Adam sins and the whole world suffered. We have a biblical illustration for us of the spread of sin.

[20 : 52] Even playing on the book of Joshua, Achan sinned in Joshua, and Israel was defeated. His sins spread, and there was a lot of collateral. David sinned, and his whole household bled for chapters.

Praise the Lord, we're in the epilogue now. But that was a mess, wasn't it? And Saul sinned here, and years later, the land is under famine.

sinned. Does that mean God is unjust? If anything, that proves that he is just, doesn't it?

He just doesn't tolerate and just wipe the record. What just God would do that, right? Or does this mean that sin might be far more terrible than what we're believing the lies of our culture today that has desensitized us to the weight of sin?

Could we have bought into the lie that sin isn't just too serious, and that sin is more terrible than we often like to admit? It's definitely the latter.

[22 : 01] Sin spreads by nature. But we also see here, as the verses continue in verse 3, you see the search for atonement exposes the horror of sin.

David asked the Gibeonites, what shall I do for you, and how shall I make atonement, that you may bless the heritage of the Lord?

The word atonement is central here. David knows this is not merely a political problem, and this has gotten very spiritual since the Lord instructed him of the issue, and this is not merely a matter of just making things right and smoothing over the past between Israelite and the Gibeonites.

No, the famine is the materialization of ongoing unresolved blood guilt and wrath. It is a broken covenant, and that type of guilt has to be dealt with.

It has to be dealt with. The Gibeonites refuse cash payment. David might try to Venmo or PayPal him over something, reparation of some type, but money cannot answer blood, right?

[23 : 25] Saul did not merely damage property. It wasn't one of those things, but he slaughtered people. It's pretty horrific.

He tried to destroy the Gibeonites so that they would have no place in Israel at all. So, the Gibeonites asked for seven descendants of Saul to be given to them and hanged before the Lord of Saul.

And probably the heaviest words here, David says to them, I will give them. Now, seven likely signals, it's not just random set.

They decided seven instead of eight. It's intentional because it's likely that this is the full and representative reckoning from the house of Saul, according in their eyes to answer blood for blood. But even this terrible act does not feel like a clean answer. That doesn't seem, this isn't they lived happily ever after or everything worked out in the end.

[24 : 51] This is man solving a God problem. So, now we have to be careful here. the text reveals that God's activity in this verse was not to authorize this.

God's activity was simply to reveal the blood guilt, wasn't it? Right? That's important in our theology. The text doesn't say that God commanded this particular solution, these seven to be hung, and this is one of the reasons why this passage is so difficult.

This is man solving a God problem. This is man solving the problems. We often want Scripture, I think, often we go into the text and we want every question of ours to be answered in Scripture. Scripture. We want all of our objections to be answered, or we want Scripture to tell us exactly how to feel about every decision that's made.

But in this type of genre, this historical narrative, this story, their story from long ago, it often forces us to sit in the horror, to sit in the darkness.

[26 : 17] darkness, the darkness of a fallen world, and without giving us any quick emotional relief. It does something to us and forces us into a situation that is counter to what the culture is trying to impede upon us, and to give us emotional gratification just instantly.

God's Word is making us sit here. And verse 7 gives us a glimpse of covenant mercy as David actually spares Mephibosheth. Well done with that pronunciation this morning out of the park. Yes. Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan. Right? There's covenant mercy even in the midst of this. That David is not behaving like Saul and just answering man's solutions and just saying, I made a covenant with Mephibosheth, but he didn't run out, he didn't escape with me.

Right? But Ziba did without Mephibosheth. No, he said Mephibosheth would be spared because of the oath between David and Jonathan long before Mephibosheth even took his first breath outside of the womb.

In other words, David is doing for Mephibosheth what Saul failed to do with the Gibeonites, in that there's great mercy in the midst of this mess, but the horror continues.

[27 : 50] As two sons of Rizpah, which was Saul's concubine, And five sons of Merab, Saul's daughter, are handed over.

Seven, the complete and fullness of that atonement according to man's solution, and the passage says, and the seven of them perished together.

Seven men who had nothing to do with Saul. Now, church, I wish I had the authority to rush past this sentence, but I don't.

I wish I didn't have to go through this, but I do. Seven men die because of Saul's sin.

That's mothers lose sons, families, lose brothers. The house of Saul is further desecrated.

[29 : 02] And not to mention, year after year, this land has been in famine. sin. And now the famine and the people suffering are looking up on the hill and seeing the execution of seven sons.

This is the horror of sin. I think we need to look at it. it. it. It's It's It's sin.

It's situations where every road seems covered in sorrow. Sin creates wounds that cannot be undone by simply moving on and pretending like nothing happened.

Sin creates debts that money cannot pay. Sin creates grief that can't just be explained away.

In verse 10 Rizbo rises to the center of the narrative. Think of this grieving mother.

[30 : 19] She can't reverse what has happened. She can't bring her son home. She can't end the famine. She can't undo Saul's sin.

What can she do? She can protect and honor the dead. Day after day here, she protects the bodies from being eaten by birds by the day, as the passage says, or beasts by night.

I mean, imagine this famine. I mean, it's not only human beings that are starving. Animals are starving too. But this mourning mother, this grieving mother, spread sackcloth on the rock and refuses to let the dead be devoured.

And for those of us who have lost loved ones, we know this type of grief, don't we? The irreconcilable reality of the finality of death from this side of history, of losing loved ones, knowing we can't resurrect them, but we could fight tooth and nail, right, to never leave them abandoned or forget them.

Many of our family rooms have pictures just right there on the wall of grandma or grandpa or family get togethers together to remember and to honor the past.

[31 : 53] this is exactly what Rizpah does with these bodies. Now, I hope you realize that Rizpah is not a side note here.

The author really wants us to see this. She's a vivid sermon illustration that God himself places in the text.

She shows us that blood guilt is not an abstract doctrinal issue. This is a very hard issue. But though mysteriously, I don't believe that God who judges sin is absent from her sorrow, is he? Scripture never presents God as cold towards human grief like suck it up, buttercup, right? No, Scripture presents God as the same Lord who upholds justice is also the God who is near to the broken hearted.

Like, God is in pain in death. See, the Lord who takes the covenant sin seriously is also the Lord who sees every tear beneath covenant consequences.

[33 : 16] And while Rizpah may feel abandoned on that rock, she is not unseen by the Lord. And we are never unseen by the Lord in our times of grief, in our times of sorrow.

And if we cannot weep here, something is wrong with us. Seriously wrong with us. Because the God of Scripture is not indifferent to grief. He's not. Psalm 34 18 says, the Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

And he is near this woman who is brought to the center to honor the dead. And Rizpah's grief rises from the rock until it reaches the ears of the king. And we see it reach the ears of David here.

And we see that we need a better king who becomes the atoning sacrifice. When David was told what Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done, we see here David rises.

He hears what she's doing. This grieving mother, he hears about her vigil on the rock, he hears about her protecting the bodies, he hears about.

[34 : 34] And what does David do? He acts. He acts. David retrieves the bones of Saul and Jonathan from Jabesh Gilead. And he gathers the bones of the seven men who were hanged.

He brings them together and buries them in a tomb of Kish, Saul's father. This is no minor detail. Amen. This is significant, church.

David honors the house of Saul. He was still devoted to the Lord's anointed. Even him being the Lord's anointed.

He's had a lot of flaws, hasn't he? But God's mercy shines through David in just wonderful moments. He honors the house of Saul, honors the house of Jonathan through sparing Mephibosheth, and he honors these seven and responds to Rizpah's grief with burial and dignity intact.

And the story that began with famine year after year ends with rain. It begins with blood guilt, as we opened up in verse 1, and ends in burial.

[35 : 58] It began with a land groaning, and it ends here in verse 14, with God responding. It says, and after that, God responded to the plea of the land.

But even though the story resolves, it doesn't feel emotionally resolved, does it? For instance, like, yes, God responds. Yes, the famine ends.

Yes, the rain falls. But Rizpah's sons are still dead. Saul's sin left devastation.

And the road to restoration is still covered in grief. And that's why this passage is not meant to make us say, well, what a satisfying solution and ending to this story.

If that's what we're getting today, we're really missing what the author has been reinforcing us since 1 Samuel chapter 1, verse 1. David can ask all day long, how shall I make atonement?

[37 : 11] But David cannot make final atonement. David can bury the dead, but he cannot raise the dead. David can pray for the lamb, but he cannot cleanse the world.

David can respond to Rizpah's grief, but he cannot undo her grief. Maybe the author is making us sit here in the darkness and the horror of this passage and to say, we need a king who can deal with blood guilt, not merely by arranging atonement, but bearing our guilt in himself and becoming an atoning sacrifice for us.

We need a better king. And that is exactly what this dark passage brings to light. It brings to light the need of the gospel, doesn't it?

Romans 5 says that while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. It says God shows his love for us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

It says that because we have been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. Christ's own blood is the ultimate propitiation and expiation for sin.

[38 : 49] Propitiation meaning the satisfaction of God's wrath, but the expiation by removing guilt. All accomplished within the body of Christ, the blood of Christ.

Man, when David asked for atonement, the Gibeonites asked for seven sons. That's man's problem. You want to know how God solves it? The gospel says God gave his one and only son. And we need to see that at the cross, the son of God willingly gave his life for our guilt. By his blood, he saves us from the famine of sin and shame that reaches all the way back and originates at the Garden of Eden.

And so with every theological issue that this passage raises, regarding the doctrine of God, the doctrine of sin, and all these theological issues, we ought to feel the inadequacy of everything unfolding in this kingdom because it was not perfect.

It was not perfect. In other words, we need to feel the sadness. We need to feel the weight of blood guilt, the sorrow of respah, and the inability of David to make things whole.

[40 : 07] people. Right? Because that makes us look to Jesus Christ. For us, we see them fully looking back. In this day, they were looking for something greater to come.

They were looking at a shadow forward, a Messiah to come. The Messiah came, and we are looking back, and praise the Lord, we can read this account of when people were looking forward, and we can look back at the cross, and say, praise the Lord for Christ, who shed his blood for us. Why? Because the kingdom cannot flourish while guilt remains unresolved, and only Jesus Christ can resolve guilt completely.

For those who aren't in Jesus Christ, you probably feel the heaviness of the passage right now. You may feel heavy even in your own spirit, in your chest, just like, man, something ain't right.

I'm out of sync. I thought I trusted Christ, but man, my life is full of sin. You probably feel heavy as if you need to inventory your life, and I would encourage you to do so.

[41 : 26] To trust the working. Pentecost Sunday, this is a great opportunity to realize that what is happening in you is by no mistake, it's the Holy Spirit convicting you. It has nothing to do with what I'm blabbering up here about, it's what His Word is speaking and what His Spirit is reinforcing within you.

Consider your own rebellion, consider your own unresolved sin against the Lord this morning. And I want you to hear this, do not ignore today the way that you feel.

Because unresolved guilt before God is no small matter. no small matter. You can't bury it deep enough. You can't wait till time passes long enough.

You can't compensate enough. You can't religiously perform enough. You can't make atonement for yourself. Only faith in Jesus Christ can save you.

Heidelberg Catechism says that our only comfort is that we belong, body and soul in life and in death to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ who has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood.

[42 : 45] That is the gospel. That is the comfort offered to every sinner who comes to Christ. Not that your guilt was a small thing, but that his blood was sufficient when your works were insufficient.

Not that the famine was just an imaginary thing and just so happened to happen year after year, but that the rain has finally come in Jesus Christ.

For the rest of us today, for the church, believers, don't sterilize the weight of sin. Don't sterilize it. Don't just minimize it and just go on like it's no small thing. No. Feel it. Grieve it.

Confess it. Don't excuse it. Don't just label it to minimize it. Don't hide it.

[43 : 52] Don't pretend like it's not going to outlive you. But don't stop there. When you do feel it, when you do confess it, when you do grieve it, look to Jesus Christ.

Time and time again. Day after day. When the famine appears, look to Jesus Christ day after day. In him wrath is satisfied, guilt is removed, famine ends, rain falls, and sinners are reconciled to a holy God.

You see? Sin leaves famine, but Jesus brings the rain. This is the good news of the gospel. Let's pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen.